

Second, it will expand eligibility for residents to claim the child tax credit. Prior to the ARP, only families with three or more children in Puerto Rico could claim the child tax credit. Why those American citizens were treated differently than all the others was beyond me and strikes me as nasty. But now every family can.

Third, the ARP bill will add \$1 billion—\$1 billion—in food assistance. Residents of American territories don't receive traditional food assistance programs like those in the United States, such as the SNAP program, but instead their governments receive block grants that have been capped by the Federal Government.

The American Rescue Plan makes sure that Puerto Rico, which suffers devastating rates of poverty, 43 percent, and especially childhood poverty—an unacceptable 57 percent of all the children in Puerto Rico live in poverty. So we want to make sure that Puerto Rico receives its fair share of Federal food assistance.

The American Rescue Plan may be the greatest anti-poverty effort in a generation, and we make sure that Puerto Rico is part of it.

Now let me turn my attention to schools. One of most enduring images of the COVID-19 pandemic will be the empty classroom. For 12 months, teachers have done their level best to keep their students engaged with remote learning, but there have been incredible difficulties. Too many students don't have reliable internet. Too many parents can't be there to help young kids log on and keep up with their work. Simply put, there is no replacement for having kids in the classroom. We need to get our schools to reopen as quickly and as safely as possible.

Now, my Republican colleagues have made a lot of noise about reopening our schools, but they don't want to dedicate any resources to actually getting it done. We need money to do this. There are many more expenses under COVID.

Through the American Rescue Plan, Senate Democrats delivered the single largest investment in American education ever. We are proud of that. Proud. Let me say it again. Through the American Rescue Plan, Senate Democrats delivered the single largest investment in American education ever—ever—\$170 billion to repair the damage caused by this pandemic, three-quarters of which will go directly to K-12 education, prioritizing school districts that need it the most. This will help schools update ventilation, hire more nurses and janitors, make classroom sizes smaller, and make getting kids to and from school safe.

In short, the American Rescue Plan will greatly accelerate the safe and effective reopening of schools. Once kids are back in the classroom, the American Rescue Plan will help make sure they can stay there and succeed. After what has been a lost year for too many

students, this bill provides significant support for learning recovery programs—after-school programs, summer school programs, and other resources to help kids catch up and get back on track.

Through the American Rescue Plan, we have made a life-changing investment in our students. It is one of the many ways this bill will help us recover from the crisis and come back stronger than ever before.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. McCONNELL. Last week, our Democratic colleagues had to resort to a rare tactic to rescue the stalled nomination of Xavier Becerra to run the Department of Health and Human Services.

The distinguishing feature of this nominee's resume is not his expertise in health, medicine, or administration. That part of the resume is very brief. What stands out are Mr. Becerra's commitments to partisan warfare and his far-left ideology.

He has supported the sweeping government takeover of healthcare they call "Medicare for All," which would actually end Medicare as we know it and would rip away families' private insurance plans.

As the administration's policies continue to create a border crisis, Mr. Becerra is someone who believes we should not just have blanket amnesty, but that entering the country illegally should not even be a crime.

And even amid a global pandemic, the most significant health-related experience on the nominee's record is his efforts to wield the legal system against religious Sisters to make them violate their faith and conscience.

Up to now, every person who has ever been confirmed as Secretary of Health and Human Services has either been favorably reported by the Finance Committee or discharged by unanimous consent. There is ample reason why this nominee would be a glaring exception.

I continue to urge a "no" vote.

NOMINATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, fortunately, the Senate will first be confirming a thoroughly qualified nominee to be the new administration's top trade official.

Katherine Tai is just the kind of qualified and mainstream person who is positioned to serve President Biden

and the country quite well. That is why she received broad bipartisan support from the Finance Committee and why the vote to advance her nomination yesterday was 98 to 0.

I look forward to working with Ms. Tai to embrace trade and push back on abusive practices from China and other anticompetitive countries.

Trade is a huge strength of America. It drives job creation and economic growth. Just look at my home State, for example. Exports support more than 140,000 jobs in Kentucky. Hard-working Kentuckians supply nearly 200 countries with everything from agricultural goods to medicines, to aerospace parts and motor vehicles.

In the last Congress, we modernized our trade with our neighbors to the north and south through the USMCA. We gave Kentucky farmers, workers, and consumers a long-awaited boost.

But our job creators still face unfair barriers, including those targeting American spirits. The Bluegrass is proud to craft 95 percent of the world's bourbon, but, currently, tariffs put Kentucky distillers at a disadvantage in their largest export markets.

Ms. Tai should address these unfair international headwinds facing Kentuckians. I would encourage her to focus on expanding markets and reducing barriers for products and services from all 50 States.

Americans would welcome the growth in opportunity and prosperity. And, if you ask me, the whole world could benefit from a little more Kentucky bourbon.

CHINA

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, tomorrow, the Secretary of State and the President's National Security Advisor will have their first face-to-face meeting with Chinese officials. I am glad our officials met with regional allies like Japan and South Korea right beforehand and have been in touch with Australia and European allies as well. It is essential that we and our friends present a united front.

Now, the United States and the whole world need the President's team to deliver a strong message tomorrow.

During the campaign, President Biden spoke dismissively about the threat from China. But thus far, in office, his team has shown signs they understand that Communist China threatens America, our allies, and the prevailing international system.

The world spent years presuming that welcoming China into the international community would inevitably cause its rulers to play by the rules. Twenty years ago, President Clinton said: "[E]conomic innovation and political empowerment . . . will inevitably go hand in hand." But since then, rather than the rest of the world exporting liberty and transparency into China, Beijing has found more success exporting authoritarianism and corruption beyond its borders.

In Japan, on Tuesday, Secretary Blinken called out the “coercion and aggression” that China deploys at home and abroad. He said this administration will push back on Beijing. That clear-eyed talk is certainly welcome, but it is just the first step.

Walking the walk will mean actually responding in tough ways to espionage and cyber attacks, to violations of human rights, to military bullying, to stealing intellectual property and cheating on trade. If the administration is up to the task, they will find strong partners in this Republican conference.

Here is one big test: Are they willing to keep investing in our own defense?

Our financial commitment to defending America is our most important policy lever in this competition with China. Our allies and adversaries do not heed American Presidents because they are charming or good-looking. The world has respected America for our overwhelming military and economic superiority. When that edge erodes, we invite trouble.

As a share of our economy, American defense spending has fallen significantly, not just from Cold War-era heights but even just recently. Meanwhile, China used its growing prosperity to modernize its military, develop new and longer range weapons to hold U.S. forces at risk from further away, and turn a particular eye towards space and cyber space.

Defense spending is about protecting our homeland. It is about projecting power. It is about preserving global influence, supporting our allies. It is really a barometer of our national will.

It is also about innovation and the future. Many life-changing innovations throughout our economy were first rooted in military R&D.

Unfortunately, reports suggest the Biden administration may plan to freeze defense spending. Of course, that means a reduction, after inflation. Dozens of Democrats are pressuring the administration for even steeper cuts than that. If the administration is serious about competing with China, deterring Russia, and preserving American leadership, the most important test will be in the President's budget submission.

Some of our Senate Democratic colleagues have expressed interest in crafting bipartisan legislation related to China. If any issue is ripe for a regular-order, bipartisan process, it would be that one.

Defense spending is the crucial first step, but there are a whole variety of subjects concerning our competition with China that could benefit from a serious look.

There is bipartisan support for improving security reviews of foreign investment and protecting against forced technology transfer, for cracking down on Chinese espionage and political influence campaigns, for supporting the people of Hong Kong, and human rights, and deterring aggression against Taiwan. There is bipartisan

support for fostering specific industries of national-security importance, such as semiconductors, and for broadly strengthening American R&D.

There is an opportunity for fruitful discussion here. Certainly, this is an area where bipartisanship will be especially crucial, so strategies don't change schizophrenically with every election. As one of our Democratic colleagues said in a hearing yesterday, “the U.S. will not out-compete China . . . with short-term legislation and never-ending uncertainty.”

That is another great argument for not trashing the legislative filibuster. Imagine if every action the Senate takes with national security implications were constantly subject to being wiped clean. While China plans years and decades at a time, our Federal legislation would be reduced to a shelf life of a couple years.

These issues need to be addressed thoughtfully and deliberately. Identifying critical technologies and the best ways to promote and protect advancements needs to be a smart, fact-based process, not a political guessing game or throwing cash at industries with the right connections.

Our work on this front should strengthen our ties with our allies and partners, not try in vain to simply go it alone.

And the Democratic majority must resist the temptation to pile a long list of unrelated policy wishes into a big package and try to label it “China policy.” It would be quite a remarkable coincidence if our Democratic colleagues' vision for a so-called China bill ends up being indistinguishable from a list of things that just happen to delight liberal interest groups.

Getting America on a stronger footing will not require some sweeping far-left transformation of our economy. It will mean continuing to complement the principles and ideas that are our greatest strengths, and it will mean working on these issues the right way, across the aisle.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

TRIBUTE TO ERIC FELDMAN

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to an extraordinary public servant and Michigander, Eric Feldman.

Since my first days serving in the U.S. House of Representatives more than 12 years ago, Eric has served as my chief of staff. I still vividly remember him coming to my home just a couple of weeks after my election to interview for the chief of staff position.

I was immediately impressed by his extensive knowledge of American politics and his passion to serve the people of the State of Michigan.

But to fully know Eric is to know his family's story and how it shaped the man he is. All four of his grandparents survived the Holocaust. His maternal grandmother was imprisoned in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, among others. His maternal grandfather was in a forced labor camp in Plaszow. His grandparents met and married in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. They were liberated from there and remained after it was converted to a displaced persons camp following World War II. That camp is where Eric's mother was born.

His grandparents and mother immigrated in 1949 to Detroit, where his grandfather worked as a janitor at Ford Motor Company during the day and worked as a tailor at night. His mother won a full scholarship to the University of Michigan from Ford Motor Company as part of a program for employees.

Eric's paternal grandparents fled Poland on the eve of the Nazi German invasion. They survived the war as slave laborers in Siberia, where Eric's father was born. Following the war, they immigrated to Israel before settling in Detroit. Eric's father went to Wayne State University, thanks to the GI bill, after serving honorably in the U.S. Air Force.

After immigrating to Detroit, Eric's family worked hard, and they were able to achieve the American dream. There is no question that their life experience and their journey instilled in Eric a sense of service and devotion to country.

As a freshman Member of Congress, I was fortunate to have Eric on my team. He brought with him extensive political and policy experience, having worked for Congresswoman NITA LOWEY, Leader NANCY PELOSI, and Rahm Emanuel. He built on that experience, leading our office with steady, unwavering leadership, brilliant vision, and wise counsel.

Through four reelections—including my election to the Senate and reelection last year—and many crises impacting Michigan and our country, I entrusted Eric to help ensure that we were able to come together, solve tough problems, and ultimately deliver results. He never flinched. I could always count on Eric to work with our team to develop creative ideas to tackle challenges or empower staff to make